



For Immediate Release
September 15, 2009

Contact: Dan Virkstis
202-224-4515

**Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding Unemployment Insurance**

The author Robert Fulghum said:

"A job title doesn't . . . come close to answering the question: 'What do you do?'"

Often, "What do you do?" is among the first things that folks will ask. Often, it's a question about much more than just how we spend our time.

These days, more and more Americans answer the question "What do you do?" by talking about how they are looking for work.

The unemployment rate is now 9.7 percent. And economists expect it to rise above 10 percent before long.

That unemployment rate means that 14.5 million people have lost their jobs, and are currently looking for work. Five million people have been looking for work for more than six months.

Those numbers tell us something about the economy, in this Great Recession. More importantly, those numbers tell us something about the hardships that real people are facing, every day.

Last week, the Federal Reserve's Beige Book said that the economy continues to stabilize. The economy shows signs of improvement. That's good news.

But the Beige Book also reports that the labor market remains weak. Recent reports show that there are about three million job openings, being chased by about 15 million unemployed people.

Companies are being cautious about adding permanent staff. Instead, they are asking more from their existing staff.

As dire as the situation may be, ours is a resilient economy. The American economy will recover. And the economy will recover one job at a time.

--more--

We must continue our work to create jobs. And we must also help our neighbors who are looking for work. That's what we did in the Recovery Act.

The average Unemployment Insurance Benefit is \$279 a week. The Recovery Act added an extra \$25 a week.

But the average cost of a loaf of bread is \$2.79. The average cost of a gallon of milk is \$2.72. Diapers for just one baby can cost up to \$85 a month. These days, \$279 only stretch so far.

We need to keep our unemployed neighbors from falling into poverty. We need to figure out how best to make our safety net work.

And in helping our unemployed neighbors, we also help to keep open the neighborhood grocery store, and the neighborhood gas station. In helping our unemployed neighbors, we also help to keep houses out of foreclosure. And in helping our unemployed neighbors, we also help our economy, and ourselves.

Today we hear from experts and stakeholders about Unemployment Insurance. We hear the views of unemployment beneficiaries, employers, states, and economists.

We hope to get some good ideas about how to help people now, and in the long run. Congress faces major decisions about unemployment insurance. If we continue to make the right choices, more folks will find work again, and sooner.

As Robert Fulghum said, a job title doesn't come close to answering the question: "What do you do?" Our title may be "Senator," but that doesn't come close to telling what we do. A deeper question may be: What do we do to help people? Today, we will spend some time seeing if we can do some of that.

###